

HOULTON HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER: *A Brief History*



University of Maine at
PRESQUE ISLE
North of Ordinary



HOULTON *Higher Education* CENTER
established 2001

“The Houlton Higher Education Center has helped to change so many lives since its doors opened in 2001. We are so pleased to mark this special anniversary and to showcase the partners, the people, and the work they do every day to support local learners and help them on their diverse academic journeys.”

~ UMPI PRESIDENT RAY RICE,
ON THE HOULTON CENTER’S 20TH ANNIVERSARY

A Brief History

The Houlton Higher Education Center is the culmination of the hopes and efforts of so many people; therefore many deserve thanks and recognition for their part in this endeavor. As with any worthwhile venture, there were many steps taken to bring this dream to fruition. What follows is a brief history of the journey, so that all those involved will remember that all the hard work was worth every effort.

The story begins in 1999, when a number of people from the Houlton area began discussing ways in which their community could prosper and grow. Many came to the conclusion that higher education was a central ingredient to the area's economic development. In June, a diverse group of dedicated citizens gathered at the Houlton Community Hospital to begin discussions about how to develop a stronger presence of higher education in the Southern Aroostook area.

After the closure of Ricker College in the early '70s, Houlton's access to postsecondary opportunities was met through several avenues. The University of Maine at Presque Isle maintained a modest center for the delivery of live and interactive classes; Northern Maine Technical College

offered a few courses in local high schools; and local high schools offered an array of adult education courses. The citizens who attended the June meeting were looking for something more substantial, a place that offered greater opportunities, resources and access. Then Chuck Ames mentioned a vacant grocery store.

UMPI Center Director for eight years, Chuck knew that a larger building in a central location could be the first step in creating a substantial presence for higher education in southern Aroostook County. The University of Maine System approached Hannaford Brothers, owners of the property, who very generously agreed to donate the building to the University of Maine at Presque Isle. A formal ceremony to transfer ownership was held at the University of Maine System office in Bangor on February 18, 2000. The former Hannaford grocery store was a great start, but the building needed substantial renovation including new and better resources and equipment appropriate to a center for higher learning.

In stepped Senator Mike Michaud and the Aroostook Delegation of the 119th Legislature. Over coffee at a local Burger King, UMPI

President Nancy Hensel informed Senator Michaud of the plans for the Houlton Higher Education Center and the need for funding. Through the budget process in Augusta, Aroostook's senators and representatives worked diligently to secure \$2 million dollars to refurbish the building. On April 25, 2000, Governor Angus King, Jr. approved the request by the University of Maine System. After successful bids, the architectural firm, Oak Point Associates, was hired to redesign the building and a Houlton company, Buildings Etcetera, was signed on as the general contractor. With three swings of a sledgehammer, construction for the Houlton Higher Education Center began December 5, 2000 with an official groundbreaking ceremony. The Houlton High School Band braved the winter elements to add some pizzazz to the ceremony.

The new building allowed space for postsecondary entities to come together and offer a wider array of services under one roof. Thus, a partnership developed among the University of Maine at Presque Isle, Northern Maine Technical College, S.A.D. 29 & 70 Adult Education, and Women Work and Community. The partners signed a formal agreement on June 13, 2001.

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Brought in on time and under budget, the new center held an open house for the local community on Monday, August 20th. The event was a celebration—a moment to reflect and recognize the meaning of this new center for the Southern Aroostook area. The Houlton Higher Education Center would never have become a reality without the help and support of so many—the Town of Houlton, the Aroostook County Legislative Delegation, the University of Maine System—but particularly a group of dedicated visionaries who made up the Houlton Higher Education Advisory Committee.

To them, this booklet is dedicated.

Chuck Ames

Allan Bean

Barbara Bossie, *Co-chair*

Phil Bossie

Jane Caulfield

Michael Chadwick

Peter Chase

Tim Crowley

Sara Douglas

Marcia Gartley

Jean Henderson

Nancy Hensel

Durward Huffman

Scott Johnson

Henry Joy

Robert Kervin

Nancy Ketch

Sharon Lowery

Ervin MacDonald

Jon McLaughlin

Michael Michaud

Cecilia Rhoda

Roger Sherman

Otis Smith, *Co-chair*

Deborah Stewart

Patricia Sutherland

Charles Upton

Edgar Wheeler

Ken White

Donald Woods

Jerry York

Audrey Zimmerman

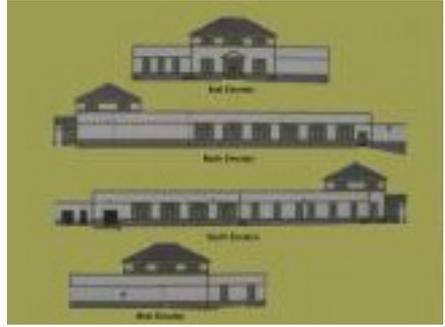
The Story in Photos

On June 17, 1999, a group of dedicated citizens met at the Houlton Community Hospital to discuss ways to enhance post-secondary opportunities in the Southern Aroostook area. The group invited a panel of three educators (University of Maine System Chancellor Terrence MacTaggart, NMTC Vice President Tim Crowley, and Unity College President Wilson Hess) to discuss higher education options for Southern Aroostook. Among those present were Barbara Bossie and Otis Smith (eventual co-chairs of the Houlton Higher Education Advisory Committee), former Houlton Town Manager Allan Bean, UMPI President Nancy Hensel, and UMPI Houlton Center Director Chuck Ames.



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The challenge was to transform a former grocery store to a center for higher education. Oak Point Associates, an architectural firm in Biddeford, designed the plans that would eventually give life to the Houlton Higher Education Center.



Hannaford Brothers donated a wonderful building in a central location, which in nine months would be renovated both inside and out. The top picture to the left was taken in December 2000, when the building remained untouched. However, with three swings of a sledgehammer, construction for the Houlton Higher Education Center began December 5, 2000 with an official groundbreaking ceremony.



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Perhaps the most dramatic new feature of the building is the entrance, where an open foyer rises two stories to greet all who come through the front doors. This element was not a part of the original building. The top photograph, taken in March 2001, reveals the framework for the new feature. The bottom photograph, taken in April, is a finished view of the raised area from the back.



Although the transformation of the exterior was the most visible to the community, the interior was undergoing dramatic changes as well. Buildings Etcetera, the local general contractor, created a learning space from a huge expanse of nothing (top photo taken December 2000). The bottom photograph is one of the nine classrooms to be used for instruction.



While the majority of the furniture was purchased through local merchants, the reception area features a built-in, expansive desk. In June, the shell was being built along with other inside renovations (top) and by August, the desk was already equipped with some of the necessary items for a reception area (bottom). This desk was designed to serve as the first stop for students and community members who enter the Center.



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The new building brought UMPI, University College, NMTC, S.A.D. 29 & 70 Adult Education, and Women Work and Community together to provide enhanced educational opportunities under one roof. This sharing of resources allowed for the partners to deliver programs economically. On June 13, 2001, the partners gathered to sign a formal agreement.

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The Houlton Higher Education Center was built on time and within budget. On Monday, August 20, 2001, the community gathered at an open house to celebrate with staff and students, tour the new center, and take away information about all the courses, workshops, and services offered by the University of Maine at Presque Isle, University College of the University of Maine System, Northern Maine Technical College, S.A.D. 29 & 70 Adult Education, and Women Work and Community.



“The Houlton Higher Education Center is a vital part of this community, providing educational opportunities to many who may not have the opportunity otherwise. We are a true access point for those looking for an educational pathway.”

- TRACY ROCKWELL, DIRECTOR
HOULTON HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER

Milestones

Since that opening day in 2001, the Houlton Higher Education Center has played a significant role in assisting many with their educational pathways and making community connections. Along the way, the Center has reached many important milestones. A few of these include:

- **JUNE 2002:** HHEC hosts its first annual graduation recognition celebration.
- **FEBRUARY 2003:** Officials host a celebration and unveiling of paintings installed in the Center's lobby as a part of the State of Maine Percent for Art program.
- **AUGUST 2004:** The Center begins offering Wabanaki culture and language courses.
- **SEPTEMBER 2005:** Carleton Project begins a program at the Houlton Higher Education Center.
- **APRIL 2006:** The first annual College Transitions class begins.
- **SEPTEMBER 2007:** TRIO Upward Bound joins the building's educational partners.
- **MARCH 2010:** The Native Education Center is dedicated.
- **AUGUST 2011:** The Houlton Higher Education Center celebrates its 10th anniversary.
- **JUNE 2013:** Maine Military & Community Network is welcomed as a resource site to active duty and veterans in the community.
- **SEPTEMBER 2013:** Friends & Needles Quilters Guild hosts first annual Quilt Show in the building.

- **OCTOBER 2014:** The first Veterans Open House is held.
- **JULY 2015:** The Center hosts Community Covenant signing deeming Houlton as a Military-Friendly Community.
- **JULY 2019:** The Center celebrates the 30th Anniversary of UMA's Distance Education.
- **SEPTEMBER 2019:** The University of Maine Cooperative Extension relocates to the Center.
- **NOVEMBER 2020:** The new University of Maine System Student Success Coach joins the higher education team at the Houlton Higher Education Center.
- **AUGUST 2021:** Renovations to the Science and Art Room are completed.
- **SEPTEMBER 2021:** UMPI's TRIO Educational Talent Search Advisor begins offering full-time services out of the Houlton Center.
- **SEPTEMBER 2021:** The Houlton Higher Education Center celebrates its 20th Anniversary.

“One of the reasons why the Houlton Higher Education Center has been such a success, is because of the dedicated staff that worked there, who also had the support from the administration at UMPI over the years. This truly is an investment in our future.”

~MICHAEL H. MICHAUD
FORMER U.S. CONGRESSMAN &
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBER



A Brief History of the Houlton Higher Education Center

was written and produced by the
University Relations Office
University of Maine at Presque Isle

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Updated in 2021 by
the UMPI Marketing & Communications Office

some photographs courtesy of the Houlton Pioneer Times